



Ideas • Opportunities • Solutions

**THE GOVERNOR'S SUMMIT
ON YOUTH MIGRATION**

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS:

**Session Discussions and Recommendations,
Final Priority Recommendations from Participants**

**June 19, 2004
Wells Commons
University of Maine
Orono, ME**

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INTRODUCTION

REALIZE!™ Maine is an initiative that originated from Governor John Baldacci's inaugural address in which he noted Maine's changing demographics and made a commitment to explore what could be done to make Maine a viable, preferred option for more young adults. The initiative aimed to bring young people together to generate ideas, realize opportunities, and achieve sustainable solutions for vibrant communities, quality of life, and the economy of Maine.

The REALIZE!™ Maine initiative was consciously designed to maximize input (challenges, experiences, solutions) from 20-34 year olds – and to maximize their engagement in the long-term change required to make Maine a viable, preferred option for them. Of the many government and private initiatives in the US and abroad that focused on youth out-migration, Governor Baldacci's initiative is the first to involve young adults so thoroughly.

Beginning in December 2003, over fifty volunteers from every professional sector contributed countless hours and energy to planning the Summit portion of REALIZE!™ Maine. The day-long gathering was envisioned as the first step with local and regional action strongly encouraged by the state organizers. Approximately 300 people gathered at Wells Commons at the University of Maine on Saturday June 19th, 2004. The majority of the participants were young adults, 20-34 years of age, who represented the diverse geographic, professional, and ethnic/racial complexion of Maine. In addition, participants included a number of Maine natives residing in states such as NH, VT, CT, PA, NY, IN, MD, FL, and CA. Also in attendance were older adults whose vested interest as business leaders, economic developers and town managers lay in attracting more young adults to their region.

Because the facility capacity limited the number of young adults who could attend, the planning committee organized a “virtual Summit” using the State of Maine's web technology. On June 19, citizens were invited to log onto the REALIZE!™ Maine website and participate in discussions that focused on the same questions posed to the young adults in Wells Commons. These virtual conversations were hosted by reporters and staff members from the *Lewiston Sun Journal*, the *Bangor Daily News*, and television news at WLBZ-2. Participants who logged in were not only current Maine residents but also former residents now living in Michigan, Australia, and other parts of the US. Results from the first-ever virtual Summit, held simultaneously to the Summit in Orono, are reflected here.

Using a participant-driven process known as Open Space Technology, the Orono group convened from 8am to 5pm to generate ideas and solutions around three main Lenses:

- (1) what conditions are needed for young adults to prepare for and find meaningful employment or start a business, and make a comfortable living;
- (2) what can be done to encourage young adults to remain in Maine while still advancing their career paths, skills, or growing their business; and
- (3) what conditions are needed for young adults to realize their goals for a high quality of life while also becoming involved in the community life of Maine.

Each Summit participant chose one of the three as a main focus for the day. Then the participants in each Lens created a unique agenda for the day based on their personal interests and passions about the Lens question. The dominant ground rule directed them to learn from and to contribute actively to the discussions.

A total of three 1-hr sessions were held in each Lens during the day. Within each broad theme (Lens 1, 2, 3) there were at least five sub groups, making for a total of 15 workshops at any one time. A sampling of the discussion topics included: entrepreneurship, availability of fundamental jobs, higher education, small business, and housing. Each discussion table was equipped with a laptop to record the proceedings. Participants were asked to direct their generated solutions in terms of a state, regional or local recommendation.

The last session in each Lens was devoted to identifying the highest priorities for short-term (six months) state level action from amongst the many recommendations emerging from the work. The high priority recommendations should not be construed as being more important than others but rather as those about which each group felt most strongly given the selection guidance (state level, six months, priority). Participants were directed to “not wait” to act on local and regional recommendations but to serve as catalysts for community action at those levels. A table of the state, regional, and local recommendations is an appendix to this document. Non-specific recommendations are not presented in the table, but can be found in the recorded proceedings.

HOW TO VIEW THIS DOCUMENT

This document is *the record of the proceedings* and contains both discussions notes as well as recommendations from workshop participants. Discussion notes do not represent the views of a particular group, but do reflect individual opinions of participants. Thus, the findings may contain opposing views within one discussion. The priority recommendations represent those items receiving the most votes by participants within each particular Lens; they are not the product of consensus nor were they expressly endorsed by the Summit participants as a group. They may not reflect the views of each individual present.

NEXT STEPS

During Summer 2004, REALIZE!™ Maine planners will convene action-oriented teams. Membership will be drawn from Summit participants who, on June 19, were given the opportunity to sign-up for continued involvement. Additional State and community leaders who could not be present that day will also be involved. Together, the action teams will assess fully the priority recommendations, refine them, and plan follow-up steps. The team will also forward priorities for consideration by the Governor’s Office and other state or local policy makers, as well as issue a call for dialogue and action by citizens at the local and regional levels. REALIZE!™ Maine participants and planners will also work to collaborate with the Legislature and the newly created Future for Youth in Maine State Work Action Tactics Team (“S.W.A.T. team”), among many other complementary efforts.

The proceedings of June 19th marked only the beginning of REALIZE!™ Maine. The trends we seek to reverse will not change immediately. Every forward step towards the goal will increase the momentum and movement to realize action in a number of the critical areas that have been identified. We encourage you to join the effort; stay engaged and involved. For more information, updates, and opportunities to be involved, visit realizemaine.org, and add yourself to the listserv. You may contact the initiative planners by email at realize.maine@maine.gov.

COMMON THEMES

The pages that follow contain hundreds of specific recommendations for action as well as a much smaller subset of recommendations that received the most votes as priorities within each Lens. However, the broad themes that emerged across all of the Lenses are equally significant, and help to organize and make sense of the many granular suggestions. While specific issues and policies may change and their perceived priority may fluctuate over time, these fundamental themes will likely prove invaluable in helping to guide long-term strategy, policy, and action to retain and attract young adults to Maine.

Prior to the Summit, the popular reply “jobs!” echoed in almost every response to questions about Maine’s retention and attraction of young adults. Even among the Summit planners, the strongest wager was that the first two Lenses (meaningful employment and career/skill advancement) would be the ones most likely to draw the greatest interest among the participants. Much to everyone’s surprise, the Orono Summit on June 19, 2004 saw the greatest number of participants clustered around Lens 3 (involvement in community life), followed by a healthy-sized Lens 1, and a modestly sized Lens 2.

Although the participants chose different Lenses through which to approach the issue, all three areas surfaced very similar themes. By the end of the day, Summit participants certainly were concerned with viable business and career options as issues of critical concern, but these concerns are embedded among a number of interlocking concerns about the social, educational, cultural, recreational, political, and civic environment in Maine in which those businesses and careers can flourish. Nine common themes cut across all recommendations: (1) Higher Education; (2) Business/ Entrepreneurship; (3) Jobs/Networking; (4) Loan Forgiveness/ College Aid; (5) Housing/ Space; (6) Health Care; (7) Telecommuting/ Distance Learning & Working; (8) Taxes; and (9) Community Involvement.

(1) Higher Education

The strongest message here concerned graduate degrees, particularly the need for Maine to increase the number and specialties available through higher educational institutions.

Participants in Lens 1 and 2 indicated a need for better and more aggressive marketing of Maine schools and programs: “In the case of UMaine, we’ve got a great engineering program and a National Championship hockey team; it is time to capitalize on those facts and emerge as a powerhouse state University, or at least within the New England Region” (Lens 1, Table B, Round 2).

A variation of the higher education issue related to the perceptions associated with attending school out of state. Lens 3 indicated that attending school out-of-state carried with it a more prestigious connotation, while Lens 1 noted a “huge stigma” for students who chose to attend in-state colleges. Reinforcing the earlier marketing recommendation, Lens 1 agreed that the perception of Maine schools as being lower in quality needed to change.

(2) Business/ Entrepreneurship

Increased business development/attraction and encouragement of entrepreneurship were the resounding themes among the lenses. Lens 1 specifically recommended that there be courses on entrepreneurship in higher education so that specific skills may be taught and a culture of entrepreneurship created. They also suggested that the new businesses could be better promoted if local news/media outlets featured them, and if businesses held job fairs/open houses at their place of business.

A high priority recommendation from this Lens focused on promoting Maine (“Made in Maine”) as a brand for Maine products. This idea involved putting a face on Maine products, such as listing a specific town, producer, farmer, fisherman, etc. The program “GetReal GetMaine” was used as an example of promoting a specific economic sector. Priority was given to a recommendation that Maine expand this approach to promoting other businesses and products (D.3.11).

Lens 2 supported the idea that there needed to be more awareness: “Maine has a terrible reputation as a place to do business, but the reality is that we are competitive: we just need to get this message out” (Lens 2, Table D, Round 1).

Access to resources by those starting up a business was also another issue. Lens 2’s priority recommendation focused on the challenge of finding resources and the need for creating a one-stop location to get information. The proposal also called for co-locating business services with the program resources (2C.1.1). Underlying much of the discussion was a feeling that the resources and supports might exist but they are not readily apparent. Similarly, Lens 1 recommended that there be stronger online resources (less duplication) and that there be people to act as “tour guides” of those resources for entrepreneurs. An example cited was an idea to link the Service Corp of Retired Executives (SCORE) with government resource experts. The first two Lenses also indicated a need for organization and networking among business leaders, entrepreneurs, Chamber of Commerce, and groups such as Rotaries.

The link between a vibrant, thriving business community, city planning or strategic planning, and the creative economy (especially in rural areas) was the focus of another set of top priorities.

Lens 3 had two priority recommendations in this arena. One recommendation called for better city development and more strategic planning as alternatives to sprawl and construction of “big box” shopping centers (3C.3.2). The aim would be to revitalize downtrodden community recreation facilities so that residents have places to connect during all four seasons. Reusing existing structures and redesigning downtown areas to allow not only more bicycle and pedestrian use but also access to small businesses that foster social connections (coffee shops, bookstores, etc.). Creating a business district devoted to local entrepreneurs and opportunities for them to share resources was an aspect of the planning discussion. The second priority recommendation centered on the inclusion of arts and culture in economic development strategies. The underlying idea was that by having businesses and organizations promote local art, people would be more likely to visit more of the downtown area. Bangor’s renewed focus on the waterfront through the Folk Festival and Shakespeare on the River was cited as examples (3C.1.12).

(3) Jobs/Networking

The most prominent recommendations for this area regarded internships at both the college and high school levels, stronger connections between higher education and the business community, plus opportunities for students approaching graduation to network with potential employers. As one of the participants in the online discussions noted: “At [a] job fair I interviewed numerous human resource managers saying that many students just do not have the experience needed for many of today’s entry-level jobs...The state and its two public university systems should try to organize a statewide internship program to help bring students and businesses together.”

All three Lenses said that there should be more internships and that they should be funded programs. Lens 1 suggested that the chambers of commerce should organize them. In terms of networking, Lens 1 felt that businesses do not take advantage of local, educated students, and that there should be more relationship-building between the colleges and businesses. Specific emphasis was placed on mentoring programs using college alumni as undergraduate mentors, and the creation of an online database of employers that would match them with students/alumni looking for professional opportunities. These two ideas were given the status of priority recommendations within Lens 1 (B.1.5) & (B.1.2).

Lens 2 shared a similar notion in one of their top priority recommendations (2A.2.2). Their idea took the form of a state portal, not only students and mentors, but also for people looking to access business information or wanting information about town meetings—a virtual marketplace or information source about all facets of community activity. Lens 3 also took a more community-oriented view of the networking and suggested that art organizations should learn to network more, while more physical places needed to be created for young adults to congregate and network. Community bulletin boards and other local online message boards about government involvement were also among the recommendations for Lens 3.

Lastly, Lens 1 and 3 echoed the need for pay increases, with the former advocating higher paying jobs with benefits and the latter recommending an increase in minimum wage. Both Lens 1 and 2 stressed staying in contact with former Maine residents and using them as a resource pool for networking and for jobs.

(4) Loan Forgiveness/ College Aid

Recommendations associated with this theme are probably the most concise and straightforward. All three Lenses advocated more loan forgiveness /repayment programs for people who choose to stay in Maine after finishing college. As the Lens 1 priority recommendation #1 points out, offering more loan forgiveness would also be a draw for those who went out of state for a job and are looking to return (A.1.7). Furthering this idea, Lens 3 specifically asked that the forgiveness programs available for teachers be expanded for other industries.

Lens 1 and 2 also recommended that there be more tuition assistance / scholarships for those who are entering college. Lastly, school loan tax break programs and education subsidies were specific to Lens 2, while Lens 1 recommended that there be more, statewide education about college financing options.

(5) Housing/ Space

All three Lenses mentioned low-cost/ affordable building developments. Lens 1 and 3 specifically had in mind residential housing, while Lens 2 directed their recommendation for low cost business space. Lens 1 said that the building of more homes and apartments should be encouraged and Lens 2 advocated a program specifically for “Young Housing.” It should be noted that Lens 1 made a distinction in their discussion of housing (“housing that is affordable,” not “affordable housing;” see Lens 1, Table E, Round 1). Lens 3 offered additional recommendations which included: expanding Pine Tree Zones to encompass affordable housing; MSHA support for second-time home buyers; and more communication about housing programs.

(6) Health Care

Lens 1 acknowledged that health care as an industry is growing rapidly in Maine, and that the scientific/ medical community should expand its focus on more research and development. Lens 2 offered strong views on the cost of worker’s compensation, and Lens 3’s unique contribution to the discussion was that there should be more advertising of the state insurance programs that are available.

Health care and health related issues are mentioned in all of the Lenses, yet there is not one statement in common among them. The most consistency exists between the latter two Lenses. For example, Lenses 2 and 3 both allude to the importance of preventative health as measure in avoiding hospitals. They also have similar recommendations in regard to health care expenses: (a) that individuals, not insurance companies or employers should negotiate their own health care (Lens 2, Round 1, Group B & 3A.2.8); and that (b) there needs to be some sort of affordable/ universal health care system (2D.1.2 & priority recommendation 3A.2.1). Though it is unclear what is meant in Lens 1 by creating flagship health services (Lens 1, Table E, Round 3), a connection could be made to Lens 2 when it mentions the creation of ‘community medicine’ in response to high health care costs (Lens 2, Round 1, Group B).

(7) Telecommuting/ Distance Learning & Working

Similar to the theme of loan forgiveness, the topic of distance learning and working had strong consensus among the lenses. All three agreed that distance education needs to be a priority for undergraduate and graduate courses (Lens 1), as a way for people to stay in Maine while getting an education from another state (Lens 2), and as a way to bring higher education to rural areas (Lens 3). Lens 2 and 3 also stressed the importance of telecommuting as a way for people to work at home and so that businesses can relocate to rural areas.

(8) Taxes

Taxes are mentioned throughout each Lens and, with the exception of a couple sections in Lens 3 (the priority recommendation on universal health care and the mention of a possible “second home” tax), all of the Lenses agreed that taxes need to be lowered/reduced. Lenses 1 and 3 both agree that there should be a tax break for renters and first time home buyers. Although there are varying views on the merit of tax incentives for businesses, Lens 1 and 2 frequently spoke of reducing/eliminating particular taxes and regulations for businesses and to allow for more economic growth.

Providing tax incentives on capital investments and lowering corporate taxes by using a tiered system so that small businesses would pay lower taxes was a priority recommendation from Lens 1 on how to attract new businesses (C.1.2). Lens 2's contention, their priority recommendation, was that state business regulations need to be cut back and funds tied to business incentive programs should be reduced so that business owners could retain more money for expansion (2B.2.8).

Lens 3 proposed the most tax breaks with the broadest range of topics: breaks for building renovations, those who join a fitness club, breaks to preserve working landscapes like fishing, farming and forestry, incentives for businesses that offer housing incentives, write-offs for participating in community supported agriculture, incentives for energy efficient vehicles, and incentives for renewable energy. However, only one became a priority recommendation.

Lens 3 gave top priority to a proposal for state-funded internship programs that would also give tax breaks to those businesses that hire from the internship programs. The proposal is viewed as a way to encourage more young adults to stay in or return to Maine (3E.1.12).

(9) Community Involvement

Developing and creating a sense of community is repeated in all of the Lenses. Each offers a slightly different view, but it is one of the most common discussions.

Lens 1 acknowledged the importance family and creating a sense of community; Lens 2 recommended local efforts to maintain year-round sense of community and activity in areas that rely on seasonal business; and Lens 3's sense of community is reflected in their varied recommendations on everything from community gardens to the arts; from civic participation and participation in local government to the revitalization of town meetings. Surprisingly, Lens 1 and 3 echo nearly the same two points about connections to community. Lens 1 recommended some form of community service/shadowing as a high school graduation requirement. Lens 3 also endorsed the idea of mandatory community service or service-learning at the high school level. This priority recommendation from Lens 3 (3E.2.5) emphasized community service/civic engagement as a way for students to involve themselves with their community before they pursuing college, so that they "develop the habit" of community participation. Both of Lens 1 and 3 also acknowledged that more needed to be done to connect local colleges and universities with the nearby community.